

Final Town Hall Meeting Notes

On Thursday, 21 November 2002, the Third Ward Redevelopment Council (TWRC) and the City of Houston's Planning and Development department held the final of three sets of public meetings at the Third Ward Multi-Service Center. This meeting was a joint meeting of all three corridor constituents and interested parties to present the preliminary streetscape design plans, details and recommendations for each of the three corridors. Over forty residents and/or business owners joined together with representatives of the TWRC , OST/Alameda TIRZ, the City of Houston Planning and Development Department and the consultant team, led by M2L Associates, Inc

◆ AGENDA ITEMS.

- I. The consultant presented the background of the project and scope of work.
- II. The consultant reviewed comments and findings from first two public meetings.
- III. The consultant presented several exhibits that illustrated the final draft of the urban design guidelines for the three corridors.
- IV. Participants were asked to breakup to review the urban design guidelines, and each of the three corridor streetscape design proposals.
- V. The consultant presented final concluding remarks and then conducted a question and answer session.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

1. According to the last two public meetings, the participants identified the true strength of the community to be people and the historical and cultural aspects of the neighborhoods. Other key items discussed were accessibility to highway 288/59, the medical center, public institutions and neighborhood groups, the potential for retail, and the potential to create unique neighborhoods.
2. The weaknesses identified by all three corridor participants were the lack of street trees, broken sidewalks and access ramps, poor street lighting, lack of maintenance, dilapidated properties, lack of bus routes and inadequate facilities and lack of retail opportunities.
3. It was explained that the consultant team's approach to the streetscape design proposals were to focus on providing a basic set of right of way enhancements that focused on providing a safe and friendly pedestrian environment. Landscape items discussed included widening and improving the sidewalks, fixing the access ramps, special crosswalk paving at major intersections, planting street trees, quality street lights, and enhancing the history of community thorough a historical way finding systems.
- 4 The consultant explained that the urban design guidelines are intended to provide a level of quality for all of the three corridors. Many of the recommendations within the guidelines that pertain to each of the corridors while the types of land uses present varies greatly. The streetscape plans presented seek to identify the uniqueness of each corridor through the use of color, texture, plant material, and signage systems.

5. The next step of the project, for Blodgett Street only, is the development of a feasibility study that will analyze existing conditions and the costs of proposed improvements for Blodgett Street. The design team will work with the City and TWRC to decide what the priority are based on the feasibility study and the feedback from the public inputs.

The following represents significant comments and/or conversations during the informal review of the corridor streetscape plans and the question and answer session.

HOLCOMBE/OLD SPANISH TRAIL

1. The proposed closing of the local street at Highway 228 and Old Spanish Trail on the north side of the street was discussed. Several comments in the positive were made concerning the consultant's proposal. The consultant explained that this is an issue to be further studied with TxDOT and the City, and the land owner, but that it appeared to be feasible and would make a great impact on the development of a 'gateway' entry into the Old Spanish Trail corridor.
2. Several positive comments were made as to the impact that simple landscaping and improved sidewalks could have along the corridor.
3. There was concern expressed at the impact of the current apartment complexes being built along OST and how they would be landscaped. The Consultant explained that they would have to meet minimal City of Houston Standards.
4. There was a question about the funding of improvements along Holcombe/OST. The Consultant indicated that the Federal Highway Administration's Transportation and Community and Systems Preservation (TCSP) grant program doesn't have funds for improvements in the OST corridor, but that the City received a TxDOT STEP grant to provide right of way improvements along OST to Griggs. This project is separate from the TCSP program, but the streetscape designs presented would serve as a basis for those improvements.

BLODGETT STREET

1. There was discussion about the impact of the Texas Southern University Master Plan. The Consultant indicated that the TSU Master Plan includes lighting and landscaping from Ennis to Scott Street. Some basic conversations have occurred with TSU concerning continuing the landscape and lighting theme developed on into the TSU campus up to Scott Street. More discussions are needed so that the work of TSU is coordinated with the urban design guidelines and streetscape designs of this project.
1. **Discussion of METRO's Mobility Study and plans for Blodgett Street**
One participant questioned the location of Metro bus shelters at Almeda and Blodgett. She stated that there is too much going on in front of her property including METRO's bus stop, light poles, and other utility structures. This was noted as a typical problem at intersections and would need to be addressed by METRO as they begin to look at Blodgett for expanded bus service.

The Consultant mentioned that the METRO is evaluating the potential role of Advanced High Capacity Transit (AHCT) within the corridor. Blodgett is targeted as a secondary bus route. In addition, the TWRC has submitted a request to METRO to review Blodgett next year for an engineering feasibility study to add a direct east-west bus route. He encouraged the residents to participate in METRO's public meetings in order to be a part of the entire process.

3. A question was asked about the timing of construction improvements. Patricia Rincon-Kallman of the City of Houston's Planning and Development Department explained that the Blodgett Improvement will be constructed within two years, and OST Improvements will be paid for from a TxDOT STEP grant. The City will also work with local leaders to try to find funds for improvements along Elgin.

ELGIN STREET

1. There was a question about the funding of improvements along Elgin. The Consultant indicated that the TCSP program doesn't have funds for improvements in the OST corridor. Additional funding sources, perhaps City CIP funds, could be sought after to pursue the implementation of improvements along Elgin.